



## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

### INFORMATION SERVICE

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#### FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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#### MUSKOX HERD SHOWS STEADY GROWTH

A recent count of wild muskox at the Nunivak Island National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska, revealed a total of 90 animals on the Federal sanctuary, Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay announced today.

Conducted by the Fish and Wildlife Service, administrator of the refuge, the count showed an increase of 15 muskox over last year's tally of 75.

Since 1936, when a herd of these unusual animals--resembling small buffaloes and related to cattle--was placed on the refuge, a gradual climb in numbers, with occasional setbacks, has been reported. The following figures, compiled at the close of this year's survey, show the population trend during the past 17 years:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Total Living Muskox on Refuge</u>
1936.....	31
1939.....	39
1947.....	49
1948.....	56
1949.....	65
1950.....	61
1951.....	76
1952.....	75
1953.....	90

Due to this animal's low breeding capacity, and continuous population losses from natural causes, restoration efforts on the part of the Fish and Wildlife Service have resulted in hard-won successes over the years. A stage has now been reached, however, where annual increases are expected to offset the inevitable losses.

Once common in Alaska, wild muskox virtually disappeared from the Territory 100 years ago through indiscriminate killing by explorers, traders, and natives.

In 1930 the Bureau of Biological Survey, predecessor of the Fish and Wildlife Service, was instructed by Congress to reestablish this unique species in its ancient habitat. A herd of 31 muskox imported from Greenland was placed on the College Experimental Farm, Fairbanks, and attempts were made to domesticate these animals. Greater economic use of the regions north of timberline was being considered at that time.

The muskox were found unsuited to domestication and the entire herd was transferred to the Nunivak Refuge in 1936. Here the animals are free to roam over an expanse of more than a million acres. From all indications the restoration of the muskox as an Alaskan specimen is now assured.

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